



A *Year* of Transforming

Annual Report on
Learning and Impact
2021-22





EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REFLECTIONS

Power, Impact & Change

POWER

IN EARLY 2022 I WAS NAMED to *Atlantic Business Magazine's* list of 25 Most Powerful Women.

As one of the first non-profit leaders in Nova Scotia representing the intersectional identity of immigrant, woman and person of power, I was delighted that the timing of this award coincided with Inspiring Communities announcing definitively that equity will be at the centre of our work going forward.

"Most Powerful" is an interesting attribution. The leader of a systems change nonprofit, powerful? In the last year we have grappled with budget challenges, so it's not economic power. We have a provincial workforce but these number fewer than 25. We do not exert extraordinary political power.

If I'm a fashion influencer, no one has told me.

I do think that Inspiring Communities is powerful, though. Our power comes from our fearless embrace of experimentation, our willingness to learn, our ability to build strong collaborations and in our focus on finding leverage points to influence systems change. And this power has been shown in our ability to fundamentally transform our organization and the way we work.

IMPACT

As a systems change catalyst, Inspiring Communities aims to contribute to the creation and adoption of more equitable systems. This year has seen a significant shift in our work. We have evolved our organizational structure and focus, and widened and deepened our practices around systems change, reflecting the changes in the field. Collective Impact as a practice has gone through more than 10 years of academic study, reflection and critique. It has changed, and other practices like base building have emerged as alternate tools and models.

So how do we know, and demonstrate, that we are making a difference? This is the challenge of our work, and its most rewarding aspect. With systems, we talk about "all levels all the time": trying to keep focus on the horizon, the near horizon and the immediate at the same time. So it is, too, when we evaluate our work: we consider the small signs of change, the individuals who are inspired, whose minds and hearts have changed; the groups that are interacting differently; the equitable adjustment of power balances in communities; and, the ways that the lessons we and other practitioners have learned affect our own and each other's work.



THERE IS A
CRACK IN
EVERYTHING.
THAT'S HOW
THE LIGHT
GETS IN.

- Leonard Cohen



CHANGE

The worldwide COVID pandemic remained an inescapable fact of our lives last year. Whereas 2020-2021 was about learning to grapple and deal with new pressures on resources and the overwhelming anxiety that the pandemic brought, 2021-2022 was about enduring, despite the pressures that had not relented. In communities, this showed up as continued social isolation challenges, increased demands on mental health and substance use services, and continued intensification of housing and food insecurity. The silver lining, if there is one, is in the way that the pandemic 'unstuck' old systems. This period of externally imposed disruption has shifted the way people work, connect and interact with the systems around us. As Leonard Cohen said, "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

This last year taught us much about the benefits of putting our own house in order.

We have improved our financial processes and made amendments to our policies and procedures. This ongoing overhaul of internal structures will better position us to respond nimbly and effectively to the needs of our work, which are often uncertain and complex.

Our Board undertook restructuring and re-envisioning of the organization, better positioning us to deliver on our broader role as a systems change catalyst in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada.

With new project leads in all three geographic sites, and our current call for additional board members, Inspiring Communities has fundamentally transformed over the last year; our approach has expanded from solely collective impact and network building to embrace new methods and tools; our team has increased in diversity; and we have worked hard to come to a place of collective understanding of our work.

You know that calm feeling when everything is in its place, there is no clutter, and you look forward to the work ahead? That's where our power has brought us.

If you would like to chat about systems change, or connect for a potential project, please reach out.

Yours in collaboration and equity,

Louise Adongo,

Executive Director

PS – did you miss our Strategic Directions document? You can find it here!

<https://inspiringcommunities.ca/about/our-story/>



The Northside Changemakers cohort 2.

OVERVIEW

Catalyzing & Modeling Change

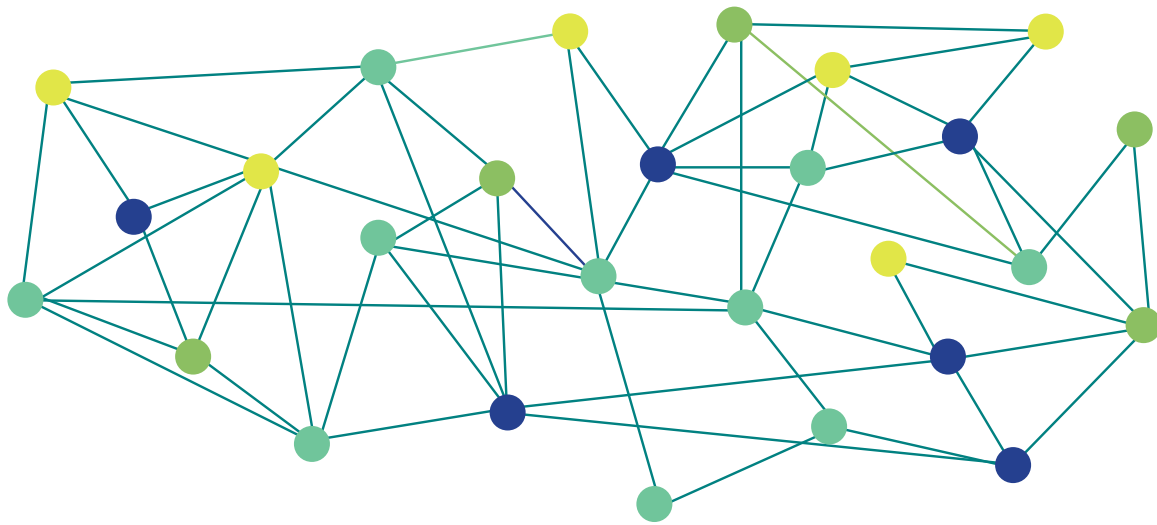
INSPIRING COMMUNITIES IS AN EQUITY-CENTERED systems change leader in Atlantic Canada. The impact we aim to see is an increase in equity—that is, more fairness and justice in our communities—and the emergence of alternative systems to our dominant, inequitable systems.

Our work is not paced for “quick wins.” We do not deal in “low hanging fruit.” Systems change takes time, and the early signs of change can be subtle. We try new things, and a number of things we try will not work. Sometimes what didn’t work tells us more than what did work. Often our learning is incremental.

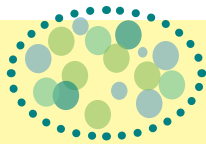
As a catalyst for change, we do not hold ourselves responsible for the whole change. We collaborate with others and support and amplify the work of those in the communities with whom we work. We generously share credit with our partners, while holding our responsibility for the times we learned what not to do.

One of the most important impacts for our work is experimenting, reflecting on what we have learned, and applying it to our work in order to continue the learning. We then share these results with others in social innovation, to continue identifying better ways to transition and create systems built for equity and a better world.

SYSTEMS CHANGE
TAKES TIME, AND
THE EARLY SIGNS
OF CHANGE CAN
BE SUBTLE.



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES *by Theme*



BELONGING

*African Nova Scotian Participation in Cape Breton
Infrastructure Projects*

Addressing Street Party Culture at Dalhousie University

Innovating for Impact /2 Innover pour Impacter



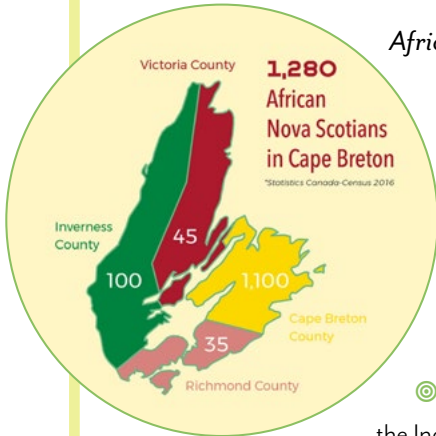
CLIMATE

Driven by Change

*Tamarack Climate
Transitions Cohort*

Belonging

A key aspect of our work is strengthening community connections. Some of these communities are geographically identified. Other projects address communities united by an aspect of their identity, alignment or purpose, and these are projects we have taken on to achieve a societal purpose we feel is important, like belonging or empowering communities to address climate change. The projects described below focused on belonging to strengthen peoples' roots and attachments to each other and to this place.



African Nova Scotian Participation in Cape Breton Infrastructure Projects

Full participation in employment opportunities is one key to building sustainable belonging and connection in a community. Inspiring Communities is hosting an African Nova Scotian Community Engagement Specialist connecting the 1280 African Nova Scotians in Cape Breton with infrastructure projects and equitable access to training, well-paying jobs and business opportunities.

Things this work has taught us already:

- 🕒 There is an alignment of interests with the Indigenous community to be explored and strengthened.
- 🕒 Connecting the disconnected aspects of systems is the first step toward improving equitable access to employment opportunities.
- 🕒 We have identified a fixable process problem related to sharing of equity compliance information.
- 🕒 As an organisation, we have a deepened understanding of the practicalities of equity work, especially when considering access and format of information. We have also extended our connections in Cape Breton, gaining insight into aspects of the labour market and seeing opportunities for alignment with partner projects.

Cape Breton image courtesy of Emily Rankin, Take Note. Graphic Design



Addressing Street Party Culture at Dalhousie University

In June, Inspiring Communities convened a multi-stakeholder two-day Community Strategies Lab as the culmination of a project to develop a collaborative framework for addressing unsanctioned street parties. This complex issue requires sustained cooperation aimed at addressing the root causes of high-risk party culture and finding alternative ways for students to feel connected to each other and their community. Through the project, we identified that there is significant estrangement in the relationships among neighbours, students and administrators.

Some commitments that Lab attendees shared:

- 🕒 I will reach out to the Dean of Dal's School of Planning to see if there is interest in having this be an opportunity for a thesis project.
- 🕒 Talk to my students about these issues
- 🕒 I commit to listening and interacting with respect as we collaborate to move this work forward.
- 🕒 Participate & try to influence students into planning healthy small events to avoid a major party outbreak.
- 🕒 More funding and resources to on-campus programming
- 🕒 Off-campus housing working group (student focus)
- 🕒 Dal advocacy to Mayor / province on formation of task force on issues



Learnings that emerged through the project process

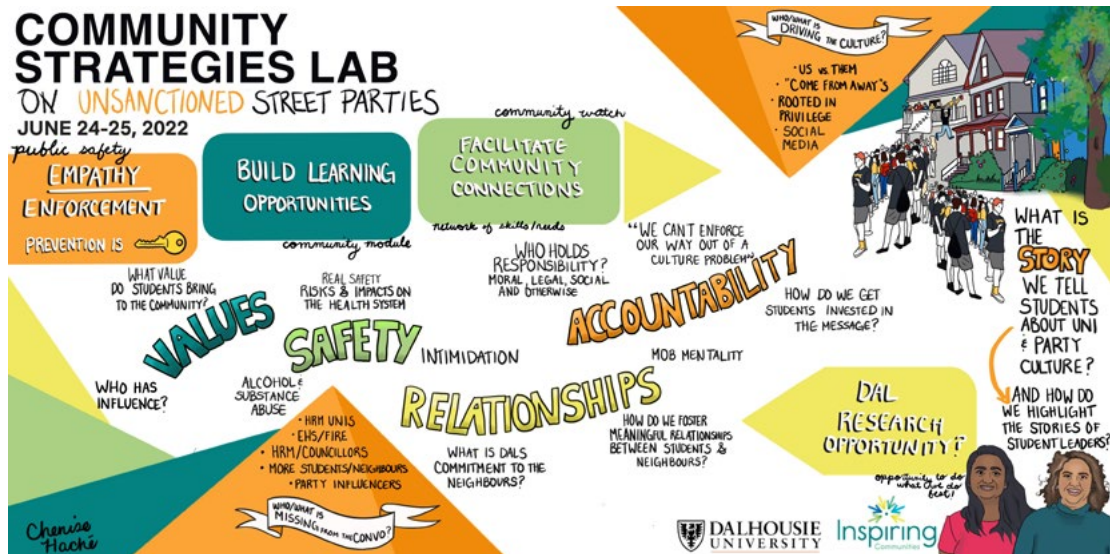
- ③ The research and discussions allowed concepts of power and equity to be introduced into the conversation among Dalhousie and its neighbours.
- ③ Dalhousie deepened their understanding of the misinformation and myths that had emerged in public dialogue around the street party issue.
- ③ Street parties were just an iceberg-tip. Neighbours were deeply concerned about changes they had seen in their neighbourhood – its physical condition, developments emerging, changing demographic make up, densifying, and other aspects related to the built environment.
- ③ Large institutions like Dalhousie have a systems-level challenge with regard to their physical presence in balancing the need to provide appropriate spaces to achieve their academic mission; while working with partners and community to hold important conversations about the wellbeing, character and sustainability of the shared neighbourhood.
- ③ Working with a large, multi (internal) stakeholder institution like Dalhousie may require a different approach to partnerships in the future in order account for the many different units and perspectives present. Sufficient time is needed to build relationships and understand internal processes and dynamics.



36
ATTENDEES



13
STAKEHOLDER
INTERVIEWS



THE BREADTH OF THE WORK IC DOES STILL IMPRESSES ME AND I HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING THIS WORK SINCE DAY ONE.

- National Sector Partner



Innovating for Impact /2 Innover pour Impacter

Inspiring Communities has partnered with the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARISA) to help newcomers develop a stronger sense of belonging.

Innovating for Impact /2 Innover pour Impacter is a multi-year partnership. This project team has developed a unique training program, which follows social lab and design-thinking approaches, and brings Francophone and Anglophone organizations together to learn how to build capacity and evidence in Social R&D for belonging. The result will be tools for delivering services that improve a sense of belonging among immigrants and newcomers they work with. Immigrant serving agencies' staff will have access to new innovation tools and processes.

The first training cohort is complete. It is anticipated that further learning will emerge when proposed social innovation projects are carried out by participants. Although a reflection on the first cohort experience has not yet happened, these are a few lessons Inspiring Communities has taken so far from this experience:

- 🕒 Informed and clarified our future approach to partnerships: clarity of purpose and a strong foundational relationship is vital to move things forward.
- 🕒 Having new insights has brought new energy to considering newcomers in future initiatives
- 🕒 Capacity building for the participants is a potential lever to bring more innovation into the sector.
- 🕒 The Social R&D learning environment benefits from a hybrid approach (online and in-person sessions) to catalyze the different ways of learning and knowledge exchange among participants.



20

**PARTICIPANTS
REGISTERED
FOR THE FIRST
COHORT**





Climate

Driven by Community

This initiative explores capacity and infrastructure capabilities for fleet or car-sharing use of electric vehicles by non-profits. Findings from this research will support a strategy for building clean transportation solutions among interested non-profit organisations across Nova Scotia and our networks.



So far, our learnings relate to the challenges of lean core teams at non-profits.

- ⦿ We have learned that forms may have limited value in collecting information from busy leaders.
- ⦿ While everyone agrees that climate change is a paramount concern, transitioning our work habits requires resources, time and attention that are challenging to gather. There are not sufficient redundancies in the systems currently to allow space for change.

Tamarack Climate Transitions Cohort

Inspiring Communities is one of 19 communities and/or organisations participating in Tamarack's one-year Climate Change program. The cohort primarily comprises organisations in Cape Breton including Ecology Action Centre, New Dawn and Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP) Cape Breton. There are efforts underway to include broader representation from community members to balance the organisational representation.

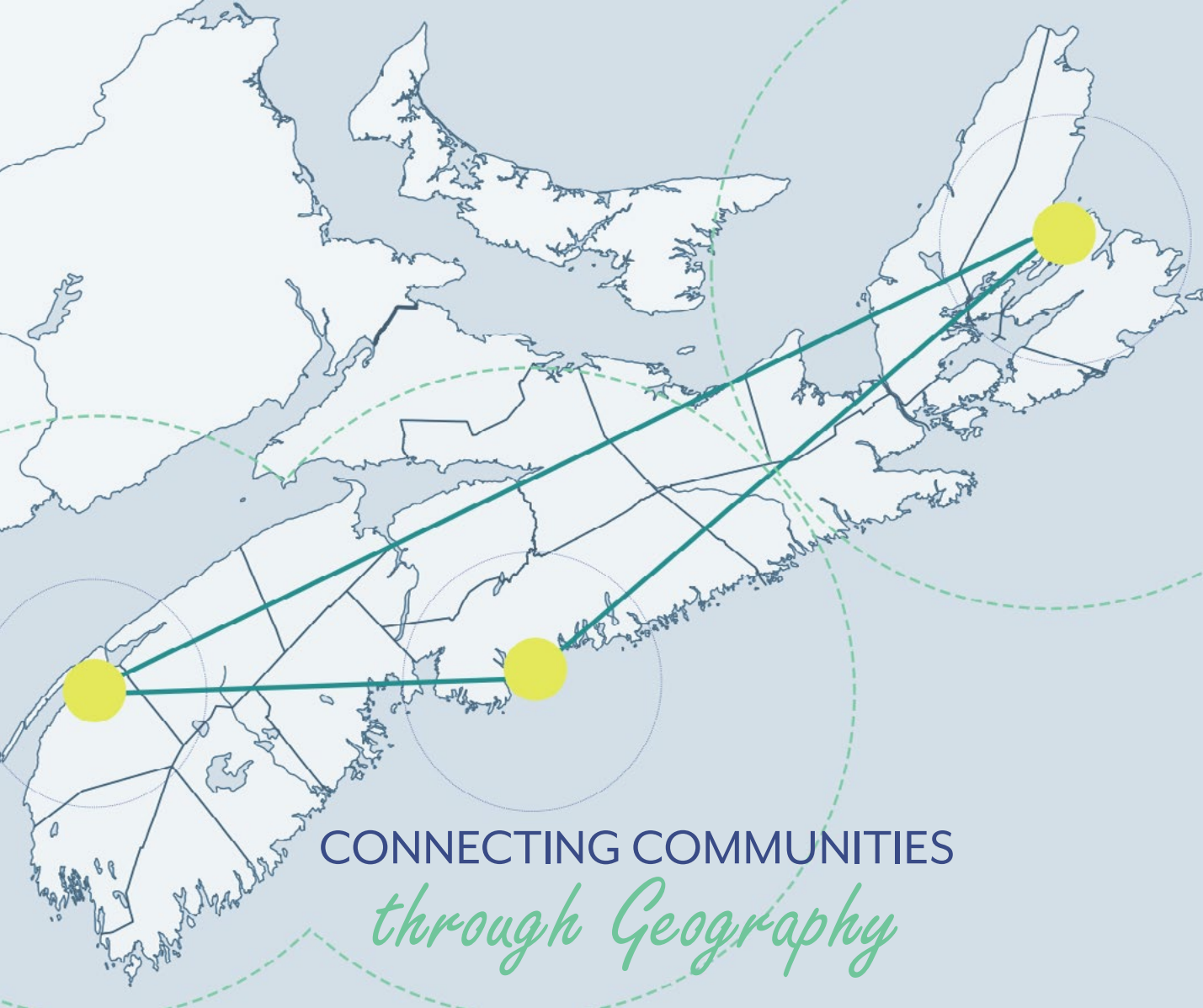
Emerging lessons:

- ⦿ Through participating, we are engaging with Tamarack's approach and learning from their methodology, which may affect our future programming.
- ⦿ Helping ensure the voices of those traditionally underrepresented in the climate action space are heard requires the right in-community contacts.

"WE ARE BUILDING A NETWORK OF COMMUNITIES THAT ARE COMMITTED TO TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH A MULTI-SOLVING APPROACH THAT ADVANCES SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC GOALS SIMULTANEOUSLY."

- Tamarack Climate Change cohort press release

[Car photo by Kindel Media](#)



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES
through Geography



TURNING THE TIDE

DIGBY
& AREA

DARTMOUTH
NORTH



NORTHSIDE
rising

SYDNEY
MINES &
NORTH
SYDNEY



90

SERVICE
PROVIDERS
ON THE DNO
ROSTER



36

VIDEOS IN
THE VIDEO
DIRECTORY



75+

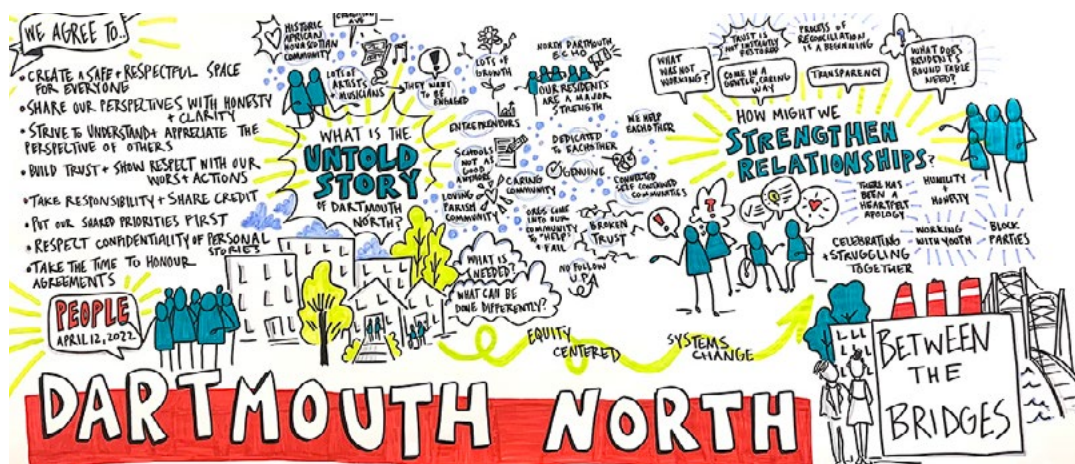
ATTENDEES

5

MEETINGS



SUCCESSFUL
SPINOFF
ORGANIZATION



Between the Bridges, Dartmouth North

➤ Convening service providers for a holistic view of community

BtB convened the Dartmouth North Organizations monthly throughout the year, facilitating relationship building among service-providing organizations in Dartmouth North. Through building a common understanding of what each other's organization does, service providers have gained insights into gaps that affect their clients.

➤ Addressing digital literacy, access and equity

Digital literacy was identified as a challenge through the work of Between the Bridges. The result has been a spin-off independent organization, GEO Nova Scotia (Getting Everyone Online). The organization, headed by former Between the Bridges community coordinator Matt Spurway, addresses not only digital literacy but also gaps in digital access and digital equity.

➤ Helping community members locate and navigate services

The Between the Bridges Video Directory launched in 2021. There are 36 videos posted to help residents navigate. The video of community navigator Kevin Little has been viewed 464 times. Recognizing this desire for community navigation will help inform our future work.

➤ Sharing learnings around supporting student success

The Spring 2020 ChromeBook initiative has been prepared as a case study to inform other multi stakeholder projects in the future, both at IC and throughout the Social Innovation Canada network.

➤ Bringing in community members whose voices had not been heard

When Inspiring Communities underwent a re-envisioning in early 2022, it resulted in the disruption of comfortable patterns in Dartmouth North. A group of residents who had been very involved felt that they could no longer work with BtB after the staff they had grown to know and rely on left. A series of three community consultations plus a youth engagement in the spring revealed new groups of residents who had previously felt excluded. These residents are now ready to embrace the work.

"We need to focus on collective wellness so that we can advance the projects we care about."

-consultation participant

Northside Rising, Sydney Mines, CBRM

➡ Seeding change through grants and skills building

The Northside Changemakers Program (NSC) builds abilities around leading community change initiatives and aims to enhance participants' skills, confidence and connection. Three cohorts have now participated. The program was created after a first iteration of seed funding at Northside Rising offered lessons on what was needed: a comprehensive and adaptive way of supporting aspiring and current Changemakers to succeed with their personal and community goals. Key elements of support offered include:

- 🕒 Identifying stages of life stability and readiness
- 🕒 Providing a diverse continuum of supports
- 🕒 Tools to shift individual narratives towards hope & agency
- 🕒 Ongoing space for community network development

Evaluation of participant experience led to case studies outlining *Key Ingredients of a Changemaker*: [Civic Engagement](#), [Connection](#), [Confidence](#), and [Innovation and Experimentation](#). There is now a critical mass of alumni, leading to the creation of a Community of Practice. Harvesting lessons from the program is informing a new approach across Inspiring Communities.

“I am a Changemaker, I am grateful someone listened and helped get some of the ideas into action. I am different, and I embrace that. But it isn't always easy to find opportunities to “Be the Change.””

“I am a changemaker—my definition of changemaking has changed. I used to think of it as this big thing. I had to be a surgeon, or offer a program at a food bank. Change can be small, and sometimes those small changes can have a huge impact.”



OF 23 RESPONDENTS TO A SURVEY OF NORTHSIDE CHANGEMAKER PROGRAM PAST PARTICIPANTS:



91%

INCREASED THEIR SELF-CONFIDENCE



96%

DEVELOPED NEW CONNECTIONS & RELATIONSHIPS



100%

BETTER UNDERSTOOD THE COMMUNITY'S CHALLENGES



100%

EXPANDED THEIR SENSE OF WHAT THEY COULD OFFER THE COMMUNITY



➡ Prototyping new pathways for citizens to support vital community organizations

Northside Rising hosted a virtual workshop focused on getting behind the North Sydney Foodbank, allowing the organization to tap into a wide range of perspectives to uncover solutions. This collective approach to support an existing initiative allowed members to contribute their unique skills and experiences to a cause they cared about, with flexibility in the commitment required.

The Northside Coalition launched at the North Sydney Food Bank grounds, aiming to connect the wider community in supporting their new location & programs in a tangible way. In the winter, several member consultations informed an evolution of the coalition, creating more entry points for members to engage and take action.

“There appears to be a passionate commitment to move forward. It was very helpful to focus the collective energies around a single task like the Northside Food Bank.”

- coalition member

➡ Shifted power to those with lived experience

NSR served as backbone support on a collective impact initiative focused on substance use on the Northside. The Substance Use Roundtable (SURT) supported the creation of CAPED (Cape Breton Association of People Empowering Drug Users). With support and partnerships from SURT members and NSR, CAPED has been successfully awarded \$500,000 in funds from Health Canada's Substance Use and Addiction Program for 'Undoing the Harms'. They will carry out this project as their own entity, engaging with NSR through the Safe Spaces Network.

CAPED invited a large network of stakeholders & media to an open house to kick off the project stating: “We are the experts on all things related to our current/former substance use, and hope to be the go-to organisation in any future opportunity to lend our expertise around tables where decisions are being made about our lives.”



**SUCCESSFUL
SPINOFF
ORGANIZATION**

➡ Safe Spaces Network: The renewal of NSR's approach, following the data

We have reframed our collective impact work in substance use through a new theory of change. In developing this approach, we themed and analysed over 400 comments from more than 60 stakeholders, including service providers, people with lived & living experience (PWL/LE) in a range of diverse issues, family members of PWL/E and representatives from health, justice, education and government.

84 + 84

NSR's tailored approach to offering Non-Violent Crisis Intervention training has proven popular. As of July 2022, 84 people had received NVCI training & another 84 are planned.

We realized that defining the foundational knowledge base of the network is essential to successful collaboration and trust building. NSR offered Non-Violent Crisis Intervention to frontline organizations supporting the community to begin building a safer CBRM. The network and model marks a new approach focusing on supporting leaders accountable for spaces across Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

➡ Research Exposes the State of Hope & Agency on the Northside and Gives Residents Power

Invictus, a community-based collaborative research project coordinated by NSR, presented findings to the community in October. The Invictus research has shone a light on issues of hope, agency and trust and their role in community change, while providing a common language and understanding about these dimensions of community life.

This research gives us information to both challenge for better policy and investment, and to empower residents with the tools to explore and create action to support hope and agency. For example, a school on the Northside was able to advocate for more support for trauma-informed programming based on the Invictus data. [A discussion guide has been created and published](#) for community use.

Research participants have experienced their voices being valued and residents' panel participants have expressed a feeling of validation. Hearing the research helped residents begin to consider how we change mindsets in the community & better understand the issues we face.

"I'm thankful to see a different sector
[] approach to try to understand and
communicate our experiences."

"This is the 'we' I've
been waiting for."

"Change has to start with
a new way of thinking. Begin with our
children and their eagerness to learn.
Break the cycle of multi-generational
despair."

"There is hope for the Northside.
The lack of respect of various
careers/institutions within our
community is problematic."

"Left wondering how we will
identify action-oriented projects
to meaningfully mobilize the
community."

A school on the Northside
was able to advocate for more
support for trauma-informed
programming based on the
Invictus data

"I feel a renewed feeling that now
more than ever, my community
needs me to step up."



Turning the Tide, Digby and Area

➡ Empowering youth and integrating their feedback

The Digby Area Youth Space was first established in 2021. Its use was challenged by waves of pandemic restrictions and the fear of infection. When restrictions began to ease, Turning the Tide recognized that a more accessible, convenient space would be better utilized. In light of the geographically dispersed nature of the communities, more than one space should be planned for. The new DAYS drop-in space for youth launched in Spring 2022. More spaces are planned.

Turning the Tide staff prepared a case study on the youth-led process for creating the youth space at DAYS. [This case study is posted on the Tamarack Institute web-site](#), to share the lessons they have learned with other social innovation initiatives.

In 2021, TtT offered a mix of in-person and online events designed to combat social isolation and offer connection, education and entertainment. The virtual campfire (with S'mores kits delivered to participants), camping, Outdoor Day on Brier Island and outdoor movie events proven especially popular with area families.

➡ Engaging with community to locate and lift up diverse voices

Recruiting and connecting people to the strategic and working group levels of governance continues with a focus on increasing diversity and the range of lived experiences represented.

TtT contracted Roberts Wellness Services to deliver a 6-week Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training to staff, volunteers and community partners to ensure the most welcoming environment for diverse people to work with us.



TURNING THE TIDE

Staff are connecting with local leaders in the BIPOC community to learn how the initiative can be more inviting and attract more staff and volunteers from these communities.

Three people that identify as African Nova Scotian sit on the Turning the Tide Leadership Table and the initiative is holding open a seat for someone identifying as Indigenous.

TtT is intentionally using our hiring practices to gain more diversity of experiences and insights on staff: one of our youth interns identifies as Indigenous, one as LGBTQ+ and having an invisible disability, and our Youth Outreach Worker identifies as non-binary.

Lessons Learned from DAYS

- 🕒 You do not have to start from scratch
- 🕒 Youth involvement is crucial.
- 🕒 Be adaptable and willing to pivot.
- 🕒 When there are barriers, be creative.
- 🕒 Partnerships are important.
- 🕒 Building awareness and engagement takes time

➡ Getting Youth Moving in New Ways

Consultation with youth had also revealed that transportation was an issue, again exacerbated by the pandemic. A successful application to the Rural Youth Innovation Fund means Turning the Tide is able to offer a transportation project in 2022-2023 to support youth in getting to jobs, sports, activities, and so on.

Established a Youth Outreach Program to provide both direct supports and systems navigation to youth facing barriers. This responds to a gap in services, and is helping build resiliency in Digby's youth.

Directed peer panel presentations at 3 high schools, speaking to 120 students on topics like universities versus college, choosing a career, money and more.



44

YOUTH ATTENDED
A BOWLING EVENT



120

STUDENTS ATTENDED
POST-SECONDARY PEER
INFORMATION PANELS



50

YOUTH PARTICIPATING
IN TRANSPORTATION
PROJECT (AFTER ONLY
2 MONTHS)



81%

WOULD HAVE NO
TRANSPORTATION
WITHOUT T&T
TRANSPORTATION
PROJECT

It is super helpful to have a panel of post-secondary students to speak to our high school students. We can't cover this all in class, and it is not like students would listen to us... it has been a long time since university and things have changed.
- high school teachers

A sports team would have had to forfeit their game if it wasn't for the transportation project. They didn't have parents who were able or willing to drive, and the school does not give money for buses.



A model of ways to create space to deepen how we talk about what is actually happening in the organization

CONVERGE

- GROWTH
- Inter-Connectedness
- Sustainability
- Variety
- Nourish ~ Produce
- Roots
- Depth

IC would like to become an ORCHARD.

DIVERGE

- Emphasis - internal, the work, impact
- timing: short & long-term

IC to become the gardener of community work in NS cultivating ideas and transformation

"Whole"

- See the orchard for the trees → seeing bigger, more, whole ecosystem

- inter-dependence
- how we grow is integral to what we grow

Core Learning & Impact

COMMUNICATIONS, OPERATIONS (AND FINANCE), RESEARCH (AND PARTNERSHIPS) & EVALUATION

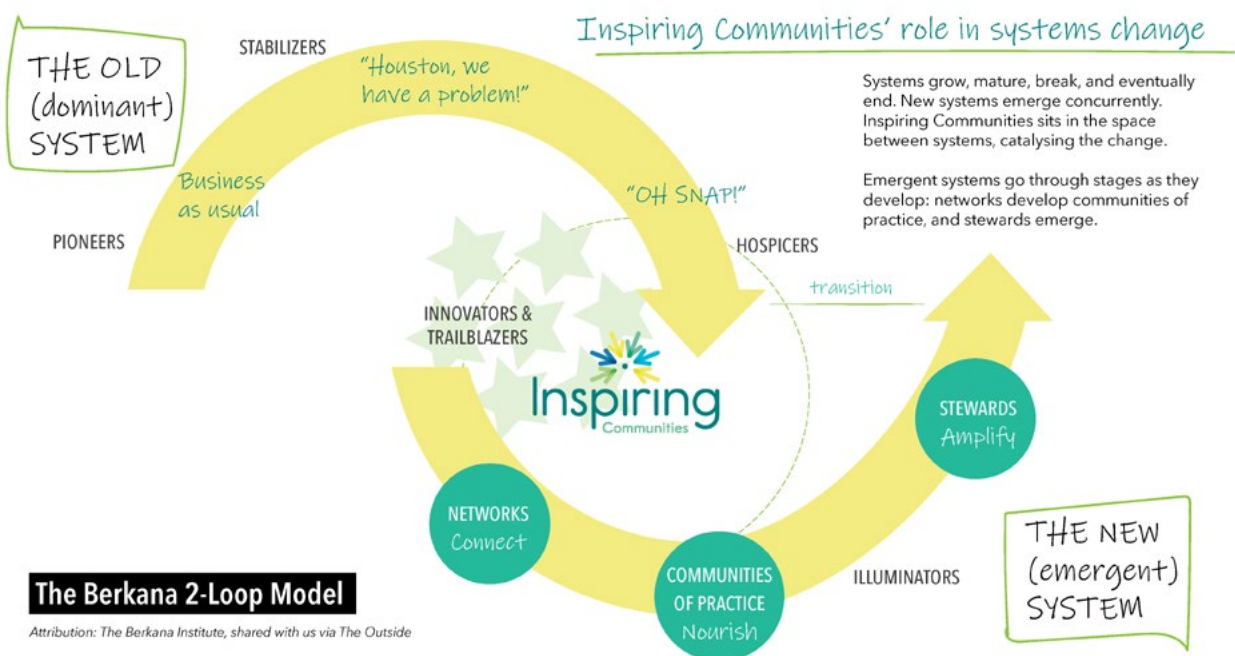
➡ Developing common understanding and tools



One key project we've undertaken this year is to develop a common understanding of what we do, and the tools to do it. Our staff has been engaged in an eight-month Systems Practice course to ensure a shared understanding and vocabulary around our work. The impact of this has yet to be fully felt, but the Northside Rising Team undertook a shorter version of the course as a pilot, and as a result, the team is stronger and has used the practice as a foundation for NSR's new Framework for Change.

Our Systems Practice Course is adapted from [Acumen Academy's excellent course](#), and customized and facilitated by [Amanda Rae Storteboom](#).

In May, we gathered in Cornwallis, hosted by Turning the Tides for a staff retreat to further deepen our knowledge and common understanding. We were facilitated by Tim Merry and Tuesday Ryan-Hart of [The Outside](#), who walked us through the Berkana Two-Loop Model. This model has helped us understand and explain where we position our work in systems change.





➡ Reflective practice changes how we grant and build networks

Reflecting and evaluating our experiences with WeavEast grants, the Nova Scotia Network for Social Change fellowships and seed grants at each of three initiatives (including the Northside Changemakers Program) has shifted the way we grant to a less cumbersome, more supportive and intentionally equity-centred process. These reflections have also informed our thinking around network building. We have launched a new Atlantic Changemakers Council which will integrate these learnings.

➡ We are learning to collaborate differently, and for different reasons

Our partnerships with Dalhousie, ARAISA and GovLab have made clear the importance of power balance and clarity of purpose, scope and roles at the outset of a project to ensure best outcomes.

Participatory City's Every One Every Day—Kjipuktuk Halifax and events that explored systems change from different perspectives, like the Tamarack Connect conference, The Art of City Building and the Black Policy Conference have fed into our understanding of perspectives required in equity work. Our partnerships with the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant-Serving Agencies (ARAISA) and the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute (DBDLI) have extended

our work into new areas and connected us with communities beyond our previous scope. We are proud to represent SI Canada as the Atlantic Node. We continue to be approached for new partnerships, evidence of the impact of our model and our reputation in communities:

- ⦿ Coordination for the African NS Road to Economic Prosperity - Elder Council.
- ⦿ Advisory role on the Canadian Council for Non-profit Digital Resilience
- ⦿ Host of a Youth Outreach Worker role in our Turning the Tide initiative

➡ We are strengthening our CORE

While the internal workings of an organisation rarely register as impacts in the community, they have a significant impact on our work, what we are able to do, and how effectively we do it. Our Monday Essentials internal news blast ensures that everyone has equal transparent access to current events, professional development opportunities, resources and news. We have developed or amended policies in alignment with our vision, mission, mandate and values. We have improved our financial processes and have engaged an external auditor to undertake our first financial review with plans to begin full annual audits of our financial statements in 2023.

➡ We have reflected on citizen engagement

Through reflecting on our collective impact work, we have learned that when you build a coalition of voices in community to hold power for decision-making, it is advisable to attend to shifting dynamics of power based on group composition, quality and quantity of decisions made, types of decisions the group is responsible to make, who is (and how they are) allowed to hold issues in priority. We must continuously ask whose voice is elevated, and whose is missing or silenced.

➡ Research requires unexpected resources

We learned that approaching research, like other projects, requires strong clarity of vision and an understanding of the approach and unique voice the researcher engaged will bring to the work. Arms' length research allows space for us to sensemake with communities, rather than positioning us as the content experts. Research conducted in partnership with an external researcher requires careful consideration of any community members engaged, how their participation will affect relationships, and transparent planning of how the research will be shared from the outset of the project.

➡ Our evaluation practices continue to evolve

We continue to work in partnership with other organizations in Atlantic Canada to build the capacity and experience of new and emerging evaluators. As part of this model, we are in discussions to co-host the DE community of practice with CEI (St. FX) and Canadian Evaluation Society NS Chapter. We are also looking at avenues to generate revenue from the DE course which was developed and piloted internally in 2021. Frameworks for Change have been developed for Northside Rising and Turning the Tide, and Between the Bridges is in the process of developing one.

➡ Speaking to equity, systems change and transformation

Below are a few of the activities our staff and / or executive director have been engaged with that addressed equity, systems change and social transformations.



➡ Lack of clarity affects the work

We learned that when community members are not aware of Inspiring Communities' role, responsibility and relationship with their local community initiative, consequences may include a breakdown of trust when provincial decisions affect the community. We also learned that our inability to clearly articulate our mission and purpose was leading to confusion among staff and board as well as many community members.

Last spring, our external community expressed this confusion in survey results, where responses attributed some of the confusion to language and website layout:

- 🕒 I don't think I know what IC is doing enough to answer this or the next questions. There is a lot of text on your website but in a nutshell I couldn't really explain what you do.
- 🕒 Based on information provided on the website this was not communicated clearly [how we collaborate]
- 🕒 [Thoughts on pillars] I think some clarity on what actually means.
- 🕒 I think your language should be as accessible as possible, and not seen as too intellectualized or high-falutin'
- 🕒 If we could provide more clarity it would be helpful as I was slightly unclear until I met with someone from your staff.
- 🕒 I don't think the average person would come away from the website with a clear sense of what it is you do.

We have spent extra time this year working on simplifying and clarifying our mission, vision and strategic directions, and on writing this report, including 'test driving' the materials with some important audiences.

Here is a sample of the feedback we've had:

- 🕒 "I really admire the strategy document. Well done." - Board Member
- 🕒 "I love the symbol with equity in the middle – so proud!" - Board Member
- 🕒 "This is fantastic. Well done (- and super well written too I might add)!" - Collaborator
- 🕒 "I loved the part where you talk about systems change being hard to define and then defining it in a way that isn't so hard anyway... We need more of this in our lives. Hats off to the hard work." - Sector Partner
- 🕒 "I look forward to learning more about your AOCB initiative. I have looked at your website - impressive and important connections, work and outcomes!!" - Sector partner
- 🕒 "Gorgeous piece of work you've done together!" - Collaborator
- 🕒 "I am a bit embarrassed to admit this, but being from Toronto has its weaknesses and one of that is that I have never heard of your org before. And I just checked it out online and you do AMAZING work. I'm actually coming to Halifax next month and I'd love to connect while I'm there...." - Potential Collaborator
- 🕒 "I applaud typing the text of reality when it comes to systems change and not chasing low hanging fruit. Thank you for incorporating the effects and impacts of organizational change across the organization. Brava to candor! The breadth of the work IC does still impresses me and I have been following this work since day one." - National Sector Partner

I LOVED THE PART WHERE YOU TALK ABOUT SYSTEMS CHANGE BEING HARD TO DEFINE AND THEN DEFINING IT IN A WAY THAT ISN'T SO HARD ANYWAY.

RESEARCH INTO THE FRAUGHT COMPLEXITY OF SYSTEMS CONVENING

The Arantzazulab, a leader in governance innovation across institutional ecosystems in the Basque Country, has published two parts of a four-part research blog series called ***What Would It Take to Reimagine the Future of Collaboration?***

As we read these posts, we recognized so many aspects of the Inspiring Communities journey, it was like looking into a mirror. As Louise said, "I think they have been digging in our underwear drawer." We have been searching for ways to fully understand and describe our role as systems conveners, or as Arantzazulab lays out, "beneficial intermediaries." This blog series digs into just that.

It opens like this:

"I set out at the beginning of this year on what I thought would be a straightforward research fellowship with Arantzazulab. Our idea was simple – find examples of where transformation has happened, on the ground, where said transformation was led by communities or used some form of collaborative governance." The researcher soon begins to appreciate the complexity of this inquiry.

Part one

Insights from the research about the transformation landscape. What we learnt, how it is informing our current thinking and to share our working hypothesis.

<https://arantzazulab.eus/en/what-would-it-take-to-reimagine-the-future-of-collaborative-governance/>

One of the quotes that we saw ourselves in was this: "The two other main pathways for funding are to sell the expertise in a consulting-like model or to create a membership model where fees are charged in exchange for being part of the ecosystem (which is then often termed a community)."

Inspiring Communities has just moved away from evaluation consulting as a revenue model and put to bed an idea of establishing a Wayside paid-membership community.

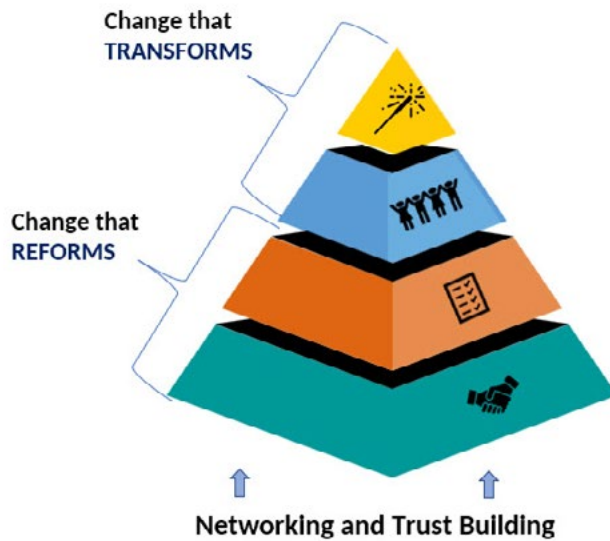
Part two

What we learnt about systems convenors and why they can help us to reimagine future-fit organisations and governance.

<https://arantzazulab.eus/en/what-would-it-take-to-reimagine-the-future-of-collaborative-governance-02-04/>

Part 3 and 4 are yet to come.

Sharing our Learning



SYSTEMS COLLABORATION

Government, social-profits, businesses, and individual community members come together to identify their assets, solve problems and address interconnected complex issues



COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Organizations from different sectors come together to address a specific complex *issue*



SAME SECTOR PROJECTS & INITIATIVES

Same sector share *new goals* that advance the efforts of all those involved



SAME SECTOR COLLABORATION

Same sector organizations connect and *overlap their goals* to improve *efficiencies and effectiveness*

(Herchmer, B)

Leadership

today is about courage. Courage to realize our challenges are complex and no one individual, organization, or sector can resolve them on their own. That means we have to let go of the idea that we alone have the answers. Instead, we need to strengthen our individual and organizational competencies in order to become convenors who call meetings before we have the answers, aren't intimidated by messy, and can ensure a culture where all voices are heard. Only then, can our collective gifts, experience, and wisdom be focused on building a better future for all.

– Brenda Herchmer, *Campus for Communities of the Future*

Essential Competencies for Futurism



1.0 AMPLIFY STRENGTHS



Maximize the leadership assets of one's self and others.

2.0 MOBILIZE COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES



Apply a community or stakeholder-led planning approach to development.

3.0 UTILIZE STRATEGIC FORESIGHT



Apply foresight that recognizes and uses change to support development.

4.0 PROMOTE SYSTEMS-WORK



Respond to the broader influence of local and global systems.

5.0 SERVE AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE



Ensure an inclusive and equitable process that mobilizes collective action for growth.

6.0 PRIORITIZE CITIZEN RESPONSIBILITY



Encourage shared ownership of community issues and opportunities.

7.0 ADVOCATE FOR BALANCED DEVELOPMENT



Advocate for balance between community, environmental, and economic development.

8.0 EMPLOY ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACHES



Facilitate operational infrastructure and e-commerce solutions that contribute to sustainability.



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